

## **FEDERAL AGENCY SET TO RELEASE TIE LINE STUDY**

*By Karl Puckett*

Major developments in the regulatory review of what would be the first merchant transmission line between Lethbridge, Alberta, and Great Falls are occurring north and south of the border.

The Montana Alberta Tie Line, which is expected to spawn wind farms in northcentral Montana, would be owned by Tonbridge Corp., a Toronto-based energy firm.

State officials announced Friday that an environmental study of the project would be released for public review sometime next week.

On Jan. 31, the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board approved the project's application, with conditions, including that it resolve disputes with landowners. A permit to build the line will be issued only if that condition and others are met.

A 45-day comment period will begin Feb. 15 on the U.S. environmental document.

The new study will not contain a decision, but will include additional information on the cost of farming around the power poles and the cumulative impact of the wind farms that will tie into the line, said Tom Ring of the state Department of Environmental Quality.

Additional information about changes in tax revenues also will be in the report.

The DEQ previously issued an environmental study a year ago on behalf of the state and the U.S. Department of Energy, which also must permit the project.

Additional concerns then were raised, including the impact the transmission line would have on farmers as well as worries about spin-off wind farms. Three wind farm developers have purchased capacity along the line.

As a result, the Department of Energy announced the second study.

Gov. Brian Schweitzer and U.S. Sens. Max Baucus and Jon Tester described the pending release of the environmental document for the study of the U.S. portion of the project as bringing the MATL project "one step closer to reality."

If built, the 230-kilovolt line would allow for 300 megawatts of transmission in each direction.

The senators and Schweitzer said they asked U.S. Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman to speed up the process.

Across the boarder, the EUB will issue a permit to construct the line, and a license to operate it, when Montana Alberta Tie Ltd. satisfies the conditions attached to the Jan. 31 approval of its applications, said MATL's Bob Williams.

The company has yet to obtain easements it needs along 50 percent of the 203-mile project, in both the U.S. and Canada, he added.

"Our top priority is to meet with landowners and start dialogue and negotiations," Williams said.

The EUB has set a deadline of April 30 for MATL to submit a report on the talks with landowners and the dispute resolution process.